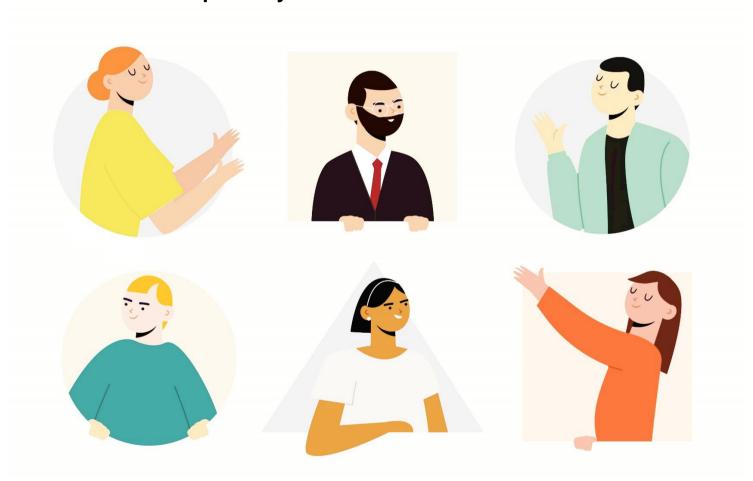OPEN MINDS

OPEN MINDS IO2-A5 Report

A transnational research analysis of deradicalization pathways towards social inclusion

KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
KA205 - Strategic Partnerships for youth Form ID: KA205-66AB2BEC

Prepared by MIITR in February 2023

Partnership

SOSU ØSTJYLLAND - Denmark

MIITR - Slovenia

STANDO LTD - Cyprus

FRAMEWORK – Italy

HORIZON ProConsult - Bulgaria

Innovation Hive - Greece

PFE – Projects For Europe - Belgium

Table of Contents

Introduction

Open Minds is a transnational project which seeks to investigate and fight the phenomenon of radicalization, as well as to understand the modern tendencies of extremism and radicalization which flows on social media and how this impacts society, especially how it impacts young people. This report is part of Intellectual Output 2, which focuses on the collection and analysis of deradicalization pathways and exit strategies across age and gender to promote the social inclusion of youth. IO2 activities will start with the organisation of ethnographic field trips into the areas associated with the extreme radicalization of the consortium countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Italy and Slovenia) and the investigation of measures existing in these areas regarding deradicalization and social inclusion. Ethnographic data from these field trips will be compared with narrative analysis of deradicalization pathways at the later stage. The data source for narrative analysis of deradicalization pathways will be online life stories of radicalization and exit experiences of former radicalized individuals (religious and political). These narratives will be systematically analysed and thermalised, and the output of this qualitative narrative analysis will be used to understand exit pathways and disengagement strategies from polarisation and radicalization. To complement this analysis, project partners will also evaluate local policies and programs for youth social integration focusing on the project countries' major metropolitan areas.

The main outcome of IO2 activities is to provide concrete and detailed information on the trends and determinants of deradicalization and non-radicalizing identities focusing on promoting the social inclusion of youth, mainly by answering the following questions:

- How is social inclusion connected to pathways of deradicalization across age and gender and non-radicalizing identities?
- How do different local actors adapt or take the distance from EU-promoted schemes to counter deradicalization?
- To what extent and which social inclusion policies and programs shape socio-ecological resilience?

1. Methodology

Intellectual Output 2: Collection and analysis of deradicalization pathways towards Social Inclusion encompasses five key activities:

- A1: Ethnographic field trips
- A2: Life-stories collection and analysis
- A3: Collection and evaluation of policies for social inclusion of youth in the project's participating countries
- A4: Perception surveys in the project's participating countries
- A5: Synthesis report on Deradicalization and Social Inclusion

These activities were carried out using different methods, such as questionnaires, interviews, and desk research, with a more detailed execution for each activity explained in its corresponding section of this report. The results were analysed and collected in this report and will be used for further project development.

2. A1: Ethnographic field trips

Ethnographic field trips were organised within each partner country to visit the neighbourhoods associated with extreme radicalization, focusing on different types of extremism:

- far-right, far-left and Islamist extremism (Denmark),
- far-left/anarchist extremism (Greece),
- far-right extremism (Slovenia),
- polarisation due to an unstable political situation (Bulgaria),
- racism and intolerance (Cyprus),
- religiously inspired radicalization (Italy),
- Islamic radicalization (Belgium).

A1 activity served as a basis for the A3 activity, as we used qualitative methods to get the initial data needed for the project – it allowed us to get into contact with local NGOs and any other individuals involved with the process of deradicalization such as professors, policymakers, social service workers, journalists etc. With that, we gathered information on national social policies and experts' opinions on them. Particular attention was paid to the gender dynamics of these neighbourhoods, as well as other markers of social identity and marginalisation.

3. A2: Life-stories collection and analysis

Life stories of deradicalized individuals were collected from a large pool of existing online resources. These online resources include the life stories of those who have exited the radicalised milieu (in both written and video format). The project partners researched from a wide variety of sources, including NGOs and other ongoing EU projects, as well as those completed in the past, to find examples of deradicalized individuals. International stories from USA and UK were also collected.

3.1. Belgium

In m the stories, there is a similar basis regarding teenagers who get radicalized and separated from their friends and family to be brainwashed with the new belief connected to Islam. They are easy to manipulate because of their age, as most teenagers are looking for rebellion which can be used to convert them into radicalized citizens. In one case, it even went as far as to think of one's own life as not worth anything:

"I was thinking I've got nothing to lose, and I have a lot to win. If I die, if they shoot me or anything, I'm not going to lose anything except my life."

Individuals from the stories changed their views after meeting extremists, who presented the information in a rational and justified way, usually by twisting the truth or hiding certain facts. One individual found Islamist teachings online, where participation made him feel part of a bigger cause. The deradicalization process of these individuals has been supported by their families, which at first were unaware of their extremist tendencies.

3.2. Bulgaria

There is the common theme of the importance of family and school environment for people going through such difficult periods. In the cases found, we see the importance of personal strength and help from the outside to break the radicalization and take a different way.

Stories of Bulgarian residents speak of radicalization connected to nationality (Roma people) and religion (Islam). Extremist views were bestowed upon them by or because of their families, leaving them with no choice but to follow due to life-threatening consequences. The only way to escape was to move from the environment, usually into another country. One story shows proof of how loneliness and abandonment can lead to radicalization, as the individual fell into

the drug and extremist trap after his father left him alone with his mother. It proves that outside help is sometimes the only thing that can help radicalized individuals:

"I had never understood how bad my life philosophy was, that it was full of aggression until I got external support and started to change."

3.3. Cyprus

Stories from Cyprus speak of change and the importance of public opinion. They show authorities who abuse their power to project their opinions on others, e.g., school boards and churches, and the power of collective opinion, e.g., hatred between fans of different football clubs. Public opinion still holds great power in shaping an individual's mindset, both positively and negatively way.

3.4. Denmark

Due to the high number of immigrants and different cultures, races and religions in the country, there are various examples of radicalization (Islamist, far-right, racial). It is spread via social media and organized events for radicalized people. There are several examples of successful deradicalizations and state (exit and deradicalization) programs helping the victims get back their lives. Connecting with people who have been through the same experience and offering support can play a significant role in deradicalization:

"At that time, I felt that the more people were against me, the more I felt I was on the path of truth. We all took part in brainwashing and recruiting each other. I wish someone had grabbed me, shaken me well and said: Listen, dear, this is not the truth.'

3.5. Greece

In Greece, extremist violence and radicalisation are intense, especially political violence, and the solutions are non-existent. It is a worrying phenomenon that starts forming at a very young age as political parties start their activities and spreading their ideology in schools.

In the interviews, violent events are described as something expected and somehow normal. Individuals were convinced that their goal was for the team to act as a punisher against the flawed and corrupt Greek political system. Another common element that the interviewees refer to is how easy it is to become a member and stay involved – individuals from the stories

were approached in school at a young age, either by older recruiters or youth of the same age. Because the tasks and the joining process didn't require effort, no second thoughts occurred, and the youth's ignorance was abused. Radicalized groups also fulfilled their need to belong and be a part of something, so creating opportunities for young people to be socially included and informed is of utmost importance.

"If you ask me why I became a member, I will tell you that there were no clear reasons at the bottom of my mind. I was simply convinced by some children who came to me and told me about the problems Greek society faces. Due to ignorance and based on some incidents in my life, foreigners and refugees are a serious problem for Greek society. I come from a family that, up to a point, embraced such views, but not to such an extent. So, I had no moral barriers."

3.6.   Italy

Four Italian stories speak of religious jihadist radicalization. All the individuals began radicalization by converting to Islam and slowly enforcing stronger and more extreme measures. This was emphasized by marrying and/or becoming acquainted with an already Muslim individual. In all the stories, the individuals' goals were to move to a caliphate, usually in Syria or Iraq, with some being expelled from Italy. Unlike most European foreign fighters/extremists, none of these Italian jihadists had been to prison, nor had any been involved in criminal gangs or drug dealing. They were not directly recruited by an armed group through a top-down process but instead actively sought contacts with various facilitators through a bottom-up process. Unlike in other Western European countries, Italy's domestic jihadist scene is relatively small and fragmented. It is still dominated by single individuals or, at most, small "primordial clusters" often based on pre-existing personal ties.

3.7.   From around the world

Stories from USA and UK solidify previous findings – examples of Islamist, homophobic and far-right extremism. All individuals were converted at a very young age and deradicalized with outside help from groups, therapy and youth workers.

3.8. Slovenia

There are very few cases of deradicalization in Slovenia with no real-life stories for (de)radicalised individuals being exposed in the media - not even in articles, interviews or other online publications. Instead, models for preventing deradicalization were researched:

1. **P-O-O model for deradicalisation** - a model for a society-wide response to prevent radicalisation leading to violence, adapted to the Slovenian context, was developed in 2018 by Rajko Kozmelj.
2. **The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)** is a network of direct practitioners across Europe working with people who have been radicalised or who are vulnerable to radicalisation. In 2016, the RAN in Slovenia was launched, but in recent years, due to informality and lack of recognition of the importance of such a focal point by the state, it has not made great strides.
3. The umbrella organisation for youth counselling against radicalization at the European level is **ERYICA (European Youth Information and Counselling Agency)**. In Slovenia, general counselling centres provide basic information and counselling to families who visit them to solve their problems and get help.

4. A3: Collection and evaluation of policies for social inclusion of youth in participating countries

This section consists of the results of the desk research (part I), where we researched and collected existing policies and practices related to social inclusion, and fieldwork (part II), where based on prepared questionnaires, we collected experts' opinions and experience on the existing PVE (Preventing violent extremism) policies and practices in aforementioned areas, with particular attention on youth sector and highlighting the emphasis on gender – most notably women's empowerment per partner country.

4.1. Part I: Collection of social policies

Each partner collected 3–5 existing policies and practices related to social inclusion in the areas of the A1 activity. Each initiative was outlined depending on its aim, duration/implementation period and creators. We emphasised finding specific mentions of actions for the deradicalization of youth, extremism prevention and women empowerment, but also mentions of identified stakeholders, statistical data on the current status or indicators for success. In the end, each partner evaluated the initiatives' implementation effectiveness up to now. We identified any unaddressed gaps and possible solutions/recommendations.

4.1.1. Belgium

Belgium supports and promotes a comprehensive and inclusive approach to fighting terrorism and attaches particular importance to the balance between prevention, repression, reintegration and rehabilitation aspects. Such an approach requires close cooperation and coordination between the various actors, policy areas and levels of power from the federal to the local level. This inclusive approach is coordinated by the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis (CUTA). Four initiatives were identified: Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, CoPPRa, Training for prison guards: Identification of signs of radicalisation and Training staff members of reception centres on prevention and reporting of radicalisation.

1. **Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism** is a framework under which local task forces coordinate the CVE (Countering violent extremism) response among local security, municipal, NGO, and social services personnel.

KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
KA205 - Strategic Partnerships for youth Form ID: KA205-66AB2BEC

7

2. **Community Policing and the Prevention of Radicalisation (CoPPRa)** aims to improve the capacity of first-line police officers to prevent radicalisation.

3. **Training for prison guards: Identification of signs of radicalization** is a training initiative managed by the Ministry of Justice, which addresses limited knowledge among prison staff on recognising signs of radicalization.

4. **Training for staff members of reception centres on prevention and reporting of radicalization** addresses staff questions on radicalization, prevention, identification and dealing with radicalization in reception centres and ensures the reporting to competent authorities.

The overall feedback from the training initiatives is very positive and has led to quick and better early detection of signs of radicalization or preparation for an attack. The number of reports increased drastically, and the quality of the reports and their contextualisation has improved. The parliamentary committee in charge of the police forces judged that training programmes should be replicated. Local initiatives are aware of the situation in their communities and enjoy the trust of the communities they are part of but benefit from existing (academic) expertise on radicalization.

4.1.2.   Bulgaria

Bulgaria's main actors active in the field of P/CVE have been mainly from the public security sector, while prevention of radicalization is not sufficiently recognised as part of the mandate of frontline practitioners (such as education and social services) and is not integrated into their work. In contrast, non-state actors are insufficiently involved in prevention. No specialised stand-alone coordination body oversees the P/CVE development of specific programs and their implementation. Various law enforcement bodies, such as the Border Police and the Directorate General for Combating Organised Crime, are, however, responsible for monitoring and countering different risks related to violent extremism and terrorism. The State Agency for National Security (SANS) monitors radicalization and violent extremism using overt and covert means (use of agents and informants, surveillance, etc.) based on information received from foreign intelligence services.

Four specific initiatives were identified in Bulgaria:

1. The role of civil society in P/CVE initiatives is spelled out in the **National Strategy for Countering Radicalization and Terrorism (2015–2020).** Despite the active role

afforded to NGOs and civil society in the Strategy, its implementation has experienced significant lag as it has no specific budget.

2. **CONNEKT - Country paper on macro-level drivers of radicalization and violent extremism in Bulgaria** describes the circumstances of the rise of radicalization, institutional overview and specific drives in Bulgaria. The research was done as part of the mapping of drivers of radicalization and violent extremism in MENA and the Balkans

3. **Journalistic Skills** is a workshop managed by YMCA Dobrich (NGO) and aims to raise awareness about the role of media and the narratives referring to topics such as hate speech, nationalism, discrimination, racism, homophobia etc. The general aim is to increase young people's resilience toward different forms of intolerance, group hatred, violence and extremism.

4. **The Cyberscout Training Program**'s mission is to create a community of children who demonstrate self-aware, responsible, and safe online behaviour and popularise it among their peer groups. This both enhances youth's resilience to online expressions of group hatred and enables them to identify hate speech and know how to report it.

There is insufficient capacity and experience of frontline practitioners to prevent radicalization in Bulgaria. There is a predominantly security-oriented approach to a complex phenomenon requiring multi-agency cooperation and a culture of trust between various stakeholders, such as local police, local communities and civil society.

4.1.3. Cyprus

Three initiatives were identified:

1. **The Gender Equality Unit** of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order is the Government Service that has the main responsibility for shaping, coordinating and implementing government policy on gender equality issues as well as monitoring international developments. Despite the measures and methods applied by the unit, it does not bring some radical solutions to prevent the extreme voices that create and perpetuate inequality. Instead, they offer financial and legal support to social groups forced to take on the role of promoters of women's rights and find these conservative voices against them.

2. **The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies** is a leading NGO promoting gender equality and women's rights in Cyprus and the Mediterranean region.

3. The Association for Historical Dialogue and Research founded the **Home for Cooperation**. It is s distinctive community centre situated right in the middle of Cyprus's dividing lines. It is an effort launched to bring Greek Cypriots closer to Turkish Cypriots. It seeks to support and provide a venue for initiatives that advance dialogue and interaction between people of various racial, religious, and linguistic backgrounds on a local, regional, European, and global scale.

The presented initiatives work on three different levels: governmental (Gender Equality Unit), institutional (Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies) and social (Home for Cooperation). They all aim to decrease radical behaviour and discrimination against minorities, especially gender-wise. A policy that will connect governmental, social and institutional/academic policies and practices in a way that the citizens' experiences and needs would be addressed is still missing.

4.1.4.   Denmark

Four initiatives were identified, some of which are funded and operated by SIRI, the Danish National Center for the Prevention of Extremism. The Danish approach to preventing and countering all types of violent extremism and radicalization, be they political or religious, is based on systematized multi-agency collaboration between various social services providers, the educational system, the health-care system, the police, and the intelligence and security services that have evolved over a decade.

1. **The Dialogue Corps** is a corps of people with ethnic minority backgrounds and - to varying degrees - experiences of negative social control or the like. The corps holds workshops for young people and parents with ethnic minority backgrounds.

2. **The Opinion-Forming Network** (2017–2018) consisted of individuals whom themselves had taken - or wanted to take - a showdown with oppressive norms and negative social control. The members gave presentations and wrote blog posts etc.

3. The initiative **Dialogue-based workshop on radicalization and discrimination** is based in Aarhus and has existed since 2012. It targets the oldest pupils of primary school and the first year of upper secondary education. The effort seeks to prevent extremism and radicalization by holding workshops that combine communication, dialogue and exercises.

4. The report **Resilience against radicalization and violent extremism** is the product of the study conducted by explorative fieldwork in chosen Danish environments with a high

risk of being affected by extremist and radicalized people and communities. Home and family, friends, school and education, clubs, religious communities and local municipalities were found to contribute the most to the rise of extremism when serving as a bad influence.

Two out of the three active initiatives were successful. They have more than ten years of activities and are still being practised. Research findings emphasise the responsibility of civil societies in the case of anti-radicalization and that the authorities should prioritise supporting civil society with resources to fight this phenomenon. The report recommends supporting anti-tabooing about these difficult topics to ensure that people can ask for help and reach out whenever they feel unsafe or out of control.

4.1.5.   Greece

In Greece, there are many vulnerable groups to extremist behaviours. It is not uncommon for Greek society to be confronted with incidents of beatings and even the murder of immigrants or minorities who are part of the Greek population, such as the Roma or people from the LOATKI union.

Greece promotes both social inclusion and deradicalization. The first is done on a national level with Article 1 "Inclusion" of the Greek Law No. 4019/2011 Social economy and social entrepreneurship and other provisions that promote the process of social integration of individuals that belong to vulnerable groups, mainly by promoting their employment. Independent of the government, many projects on these topics are being funded by the European Union:

1. **Erasmus+ project PRIORITY** (2019–2022) aims to increase the capacity of organizations working with youth to invest in prevention by removing fertile ground for radicalization and acting as forces for integration.

2. **Erasmus+ project PRACTICE** (Preventing Radicalism through Critical Thinking Competences, 2018–2020) aims to develop an innovative and collaborative program of continuous professional development on preventing radicalization in schools.

3. **EU funded project COMMIT** (COMMunIcation campaign against exTremism and radicalisation, 2020–2022) aims to prevent and dissuade vulnerable young people from extremism, radicalism and terrorism, providing them with skills relevant to co-create counter-narratives challenging and resisting extremist online propaganda.

4. **Erasmus+ project YCARE** aims to build first-line practitioners' professional capacity and foster young people's empowerment, participation and active citizenship. It is an international project aimed at supporting youth counsellors in the fight against radicalization.

Greece primarily relies on independent EU-supported projects that fight against radicalization and extremism, however, those usually only last a few years and therefore affect a limited amount of people. More government-supported initiatives are needed, especially as radicalization is widespread, even in schools. Young people are very vulnerable and susceptible to ideologies. For the actions of a policy or practice to be effective, they must be made available to young people in the places they frequent and, ideally, integrated into the education system.

4.1.6.   Italy

Italy has well-thought-out legal measures towards radicalization. The unified text of draft laws C. 243 and C. 3357 is aimed at introducing a series of measures, interventions and programmes for the prevention of subversive phenomena of violent radicalisation, including the phenomena of radicalisation and spread of violent extremism of jihadist origin. The unified text also establishes a National Centre on Radicalisation (CRAD) at the Ministry of internal affairs and Regional Coordination Centres (RACs) at the prefectures of the regional capitals. These Centres must submit an annual report on the implementation of the Plan to the CRAD. A Committee for monitoring subversive phenomena of violent radicalisation, including those of a jihadist matrix, is set up within the Parliament. A series of interventions in the school and the university sphere are also envisaged.

Three projects were identified:

1. **PriMED** (Prevention and Interaction in the Trans-Mediterranean Space) is the first major project (and any significant action) to prevent religious radicalization launched by the Italian government. It organized many courses and workshops for local authorities, prefectures, public security, schools etc. *"Judges in comparison, laws and jurisprudential guidelines on the fight against radicalization and de-radicalization phenomena of an Islamist matrix in the trans-Mediterranean area"* is one of the workshops organized as part of the project.

2. **Erasmus+ project PRACTICE**, which was also implemented in Greece (see chapter 4.1.5. for more information)

3. **FORWARD Project** aims to support the pluralism experience, which may develop in different social and organizational contexts through innovative and international training courses and research. It provides training courses for professionals to make them able and well-equipped to work in highly multi-ethnic contexts.

The proposal for a law regulating jihadist radicalisation, and thus Islamic extremism in Italy, had already been put forward in 2020. Many other events and initiatives have been proposed at a national level, however, there is still a lack of tackling the issue of radicalization among younger people and students attending primary school.

4.1.7. Slovenia

Extremism is not defined as a criminal offence in the Slovenian Criminal Code, and the Slovenian legal system does not include specific policies regarding radicalization. Even so, Slovenia is working towards preventing radicalization and extremism with various stakeholders via initiatives, programmes, and projects:

1. Following the example of the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), **the National Network of Experts on Radicalisation Prevention** was established, and 21 trainers/multipliers from different ministries were trained in the framework of a train-the-trainer programme with the support of the RAN.

2. Slovenia is also an initiator of the Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative (**FIRST LINE Practitioners Dealing with Radicalization Issues** – Awareness Raising and Encouraging Capacity Building in the Western Balkan Region), which brings together more than 50 organisations and donors involved in counter-terrorism activities.

3. **The Strategy for the Prevention of Terrorism and Violent Extremism (2017)** is centrally focused on the "prevention" of terrorism and violent extremism. The formulation of the strategy and its action plan will first help identify the remaining stakeholders relevant to preventing terrorism and violent extremism.

4. **MATES project** (2016-2018) was to develop interdisciplinary learning tools to de-radicalise adolescents and young adults. In this way, the project has developed a model designed to educate those working with radicalised adolescents on the path of re-socialisation (prison guards, police officers, social workers, parole officers and relevant members of the local community in which the radicalised person lives).

The adopted counter-radicalization documents in Slovenia and the development of the national network shows strong collaboration among various experts and stakeholders. The statistics show that the Slovenian rate of radicalized people is respectively low. We cannot assume that the adopted strategies and collaborative approach on the national level are the sole contributors to this, as the number of members of minorities in Slovenia is much lower than in other countries due to the small population of the whole country, resulting in less radicalization.

In the context of preventing radicalisation in schools, the possibility of raising topical issues in some social studies subjects or workshops with external guests with which students talk about non-violent communication, drug abuse, migration, criminality, etc., is mentioned but most of these activities are based on teachers' initiatives. Religious institutions do not have established procedures for dealing with cases of radicalisation. Faith communities add that they would deal with potential cases through conversations, greater involvement in the community itself and building positive things. Asylum systems also do not address de-radicalisation themselves, as they have insufficient experience and knowledge of the legal underpinnings and limitations of their work, but staff receive additional education and training to respond adequately to the threat of radicalisation.

Regarding women empowerment policies, Slovenia adopted Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act in 2002, however, no specific national strategy or programme for youth social inclusion has been adopted in Slovenia. The National Programme for Youth 2013–2022 only addresses poverty reduction and social inclusion of young people across several policy areas, including employment and the labour market, education, housing and health.

4.2.   Part II: Evaluation of social policies

Part II is represented by the questionnaire, with which we gathered feedback from experts regarding the collected policies and practices. Each partner collected answers from 5–8 participants, experts in social inclusion/deradicalization. The questions included general demographic questions about the deradicalization process, national deradicalization approaches, and experts' opinions and experience with existing PVE initiatives. The profiles of the people who participated in the survey were as follows:

4.2.1.   Profiles of the participants

Overall, 37 participants took part in the questionnaire. 5 from Belgium, 5 from Bulgaria, 7 from Cyprus (1 with Greek nationality), 4 from Denmark, 6 from Greece, 5 from Italy and 5 from Slovenia. We did not inquire about their name, gender or age, only occupation/experience connected to deradicalization as this was the only important aspect. Participants are thus experts in the field and include social service operators, journalists, researchers, project managers, teachers, those employed in NGOs and authorities etc.

4.2.2.   General questions about deradicalization

According to your experience, which gender is mostly interested in the deradicalization process?

The majority of participants (circa 60 %) from Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy and Slovenia said that women are more likely to be interested in and partake in the deradicalization process than men. Women are usually more open-minded, understanding and ready to change, so this is not surprising, however, it is slightly pessimistic as studies show that the majority of people with radical behaviour are men. Participants from Denmark were split, while more participants from Greece thought men were more likely to be interested in the deradicalization process (66,7 %).

Which age group registers a higher level of deradicalization?

More than half of the participants (64 %) from Bulgaria, Denmark, Greece, Italy and Slovenia believe that people aged 25–35 register a higher level of deradicalization than other age groups. Most participants from Belgium and Cyprus think the age group 35–45 is the most deradicalized. Other participants from all countries were divided between the age groups 18–24 and 35–45 as the most deradicalized. Ages <18 and >45 are not seen as the most deradicalized.

How do you define the deradicalization approach in your country?

75 % of all participants said that their country's approach is mixed, meaning having a proactive role of institutions and civil society actors in detecting situations at risk or vulnerable groups, while the rest said that its repressive, meaning with a strong criminal law apparatus and robust legal framework concerning terrorism. No one said their country's approach is integrative,

meaning combining both. Italy and Greece's participants were unanimous with their mixed approach vote, while everywhere else, the mixed approach was in the lead or at least at 50 %.

What kind of actors/institutions are involved in the process of deradicalization?

Most participants said that families, the city government and schools are the most involved. Surprisingly, Slovenia's participants did not vote for the city government at all and thought that the rest of the most voted options were only slightly involved. The most popular vote in Slovenia was for the local NGOs. Participants in other countries voted that they (NGOs) were involved, but not as much as other options. A big difference also occurred with local communities – Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, and Italy voted that they weren't involved much, if any, while Belgium, Bulgaria and Slovenia voted that they were significantly involved. Other votes among different countries were very similar, with the least involved actor being communities of origin.

Select the level of importance of the above-mentioned actors/institutions in the deradicalization process.

The answers mainly corresponded with the previous question – what was considered the most involved per country was also seen as the most important. Sport/leisure activities, communities of origin and local NGOs were deemed the least important, with city government, families, and school deemed the most important.

4.2.3. Participants' opinions on existing policies/practices

Are you familiar with the national policies for social inclusion/prevention of radicalization?

Participants from every country but Belgium said that they were not familiar with national policies, or if they were, they were related to social inclusion but not preventing radicalization. The knowledge of national policies is not sufficient, or they are inexistent. In Belgium, everyone said that they had knowledge about them.

How effective are such policies based on your knowledge and experience?

Since most participants were unfamiliar with policies, they could not judge their effectiveness or consequentially said they weren't effective. Even if policies were implemented, they weren't successful. Participants from Belgium and Cyprus expressed that they were very effective.

Are you familiar with any national policies related to gender equality and women empowerment?

70 % of all participants responded that they were in some way or another familiar with national policies related to gender equality and women empowerment, with some even specifically naming the policies. In all countries, more participants knew about the policies than those who did not.

How would you comment on the effectiveness of gender-sensitive approaches in the social inclusion and deradicalization processes?

Participants from Belgium, Cyprus and Greece have mainly expressed their endorsement of implemented policies, while participants from other countries said that more needs to be done. The intentions are good, but they haven't been implemented well. The negative evaluation can also be explained due to the lack of gender quotas or lack of existing/known policies.

Do you use those policies (social inclusion/deradicalization/gender equality) within your work actively?

Most participants said that they regularly implement the policies or promote them. Greek participants also noted that since none exist on the national level, they implemented their own at their workplace. One Danish participant said that while they do not use the policies at work, they keep in mind the unconscious bias in the way they speak in their daily life.

Do you wish to change the existing policies in any way?

The following suggestions have been expressed: more support from the state for public and non-state initiatives, consideration of all types of equality should be considered (gender, race, nationality, disabilities), updated and reviewed policies with shorter validity periods, more practical solutions, enforcement of implementation into civil society/active engagement of various stakeholders and, consequentially, monitoring of the implementation and success rate.

On a scale of 1–5, where 1 = very low and 5 = very high, to what extent do you believe the digital environment poses a threat to radicalizing young people nowadays? Why?

Almost all participants agree or strongly agree that the digital world greatly threatens all socially sensitive fields. ISIS was mentioned as an example, as it set an important example for this when it managed to recruit many people from European territory.

Free, easy access without any filter, low critical thinking and lack of knowledge, the use of cookies, and search history (because of algorithms keeping you in a bubble) narrow the feeds

of your internet search and represent some of the major risks that expose especially vulnerable people to extremist propaganda. At the same time, broad outreach (to even socially excluded people) and the use of the internet by little kids and more susceptible people present a big obstacle in the obstacle on the path of radicalization control. Furthermore, the internet can not only induce radicalization but also stop deradicalization.

KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
KA205 - Strategic Partnerships for youth Form ID: KA205-66AB2BEC

18

5. A4: Perception surveys in the project's participating countries

This activity focused on investigating perceptions about PVE policies and projects in terms of effectiveness, societal impact and impact on an individual's behaviour in the areas of poor social inclusion infrastructure. The impact of social inclusion measures/or the lack of them on the radicalization of youth was investigated through in-depth interviews.

In the period from 14. November 2022 to 20. December 2022, each project partner organisation interviewed at least 3 experts in their countries, in total 25. The interviewees' expertise, experience and professional backgrounds covered a broad spectrum of the field and thus fulfilled the aim of the activity.

The questions during the interviews were the following:

1. Which initiatives would you highlight as effective or unique in terms of preventing or combating radicalization? - What are the known effects of these?

2. In your opinion, which elements should be included in an initiative that serves de-radicalization?

3. What do you think about countering radicalization through a game-based approach? How do you think it could be helpful?

4. What do you think are the necessary skills that young people should be equipped with to resist radicalization?

The conclusions gathered through the interviews were the following:

Initiatives play a huge role in preventing radicalization. Some interviewees reported the lack of a common public guide in preventing and resisting radicalization. The reason for that can be that only a few cases of radicalization get reported, and the issue is not further addressed. The majority of the cases can also be labelled as "extremism" rather than radicalization; extremism being a person or a group using fear/violence/terror to achieve change, and radicalization being the process by which individuals enter into extremism.

The education system, law and justice system, activities/values of political parties and organizations of civil society that focus on socially beneficial activism all influence young people and are directly responsible for their development regarding radicalization. Influencing prevention from an early age by correctly detecting strange behaviour and raising awareness

KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
KA205 - Strategic Partnerships for youth Form ID: KA205-66AB2BEC

19

in all age groups, and training specialists in educational institutions, are crucial. While families can prevent radicalization and help deradicalize, too big of involvement and sheltering can have the opposite effect – youth can become fragile, sensitive and incapable of facing difficulties. Also, if the family already has extremist views, the child is doomed to fall into radical views.

Showcasing good examples of societal values by including them and upholding them in law, integrating them into the educational system from a young age and offering meaningful activities (such as sports and extra-curricular education) also decreases an individual's proneness to radicalization. Considering the most common reasons for pushing people towards radicalization are the lack of information, ignorance and social exclusion (anger), establishing local groups that would offer the youth both knowledge and a sense of belonging could greatly decrease radicalization and help with deradicalization.

Regarding the games as a strategy to approach deradicalization, it was considered an innovative and possibly effective method. The prevailing view was that we should approach issues by thinking about whom we are addressing. Given that computer games are the biggest part of young people's entertainment and communication, it is very smart to try to deradicalize and prevent extremist violence through an educational game. Video games can be a useful tool in achieving that if they teach indoctrination, empathy, tolerance, critical thinking, respectful dialogue, solidarity, responsibility and conflict resolution under supervision. It must include non-violent techniques for fostering cooperation among players while providing practical reasons for fair play. Role-play games might train empathy in understanding someone else's struggles and obstacles or might be an instrument for experiencing the point of view of a different culture and therefore help increase empathy, patience and acceptance.

Common agreement on the skills that young people need to be equipped with to resist radicalization is: constructive dialogue, tolerance of diversity, empathy, patience, critical thinking, and acceptance will create a more open-minded person, more likely to be resistant to radicalization. Circumstances that help with gaining the above-mentioned skills are the possibility of being confronted with concrete (and real) case studies, a favourable family environment, school, friends and the community, which affect an individual's value system and socialization.

Conclusion and recommendations

This report revealed valuable insight into national initiatives and their effectiveness. While some countries have well-thought-out and implemented initiatives on a governmental level (Belgium, Denmark, Italy), others either have legal frameworks that focus on some aspect of the problem (Bulgaria, Slovenia, Cyprus) or rely almost solely on projects independent from the government (Greece). What is surprising is that Greece, which is combating many types of radicalizations (anarchist far-left, Islamist, far-right) at a larger scale, has not implemented a strong legal basis for preventing such behaviour. While projects contribute to prevention measures, they only last a few years at most and impact a smaller number of people. Until other initiatives are designed, they do, however, serve an essential function.

Research findings prove that **local initiatives, training programmes and involvement of civil societies** are generally successful as they know and receive trust from the communities they are part of. Even more so, joining local groups and creating opportunities for young people to be a part of something can prevent loneliness, abandonment, and ignorance, which are the main causes of radicalization. An alliance between local initiatives and government institutions optimises prevention efforts.

The concepts of **appreciative dialogue, dissemination of facts**, giving the tools to the youth, and developing their critical thinking are recommendable approaches when building resilience and changing attitudes. **Reports and science-based methodologies** are very important for a system to plan specific initiatives and activities. Another aspect of dialogue is the terminology – nowadays, the language used to describe radicalization is warlike and doesn't contribute to understanding the issue and proactive solutions.

Apart from Cyprus, almost no other country focuses on specific initiatives that would include **women's empowerment** on a governmental level – if it does, it is completely separated from radicalization and extremism initiatives. It is frequently asserted that mothers are in an ideal position to spot signs of radicalization early on and pass on inclusionary values to the next generation. As a result, women can be instrumental in preventing and combating violent extremism and radicalization, however, experts' opinions are still not unanimous.

Teachers and the education system, as one of the main key actors in the prevention of radicalization, are significantly understudied and undervalued. Due to the ever-evolving phenomenon of radicalization, the ongoing search for new solutions is crucial alongside implementing preventative measures in environments that cultivate such behaviours. There is

great potential for implementing prevention measurements in educational institutions, for example, in raising awareness about radicalization traps in the digital environment, where young people spend more and more time and therefore represent the most vulnerable target group to such extreme behaviours.

Combating radicalization through games could be an effective method due to the popularity of video games among youth and the possibility to "experience" another person's life. However, a careful and supervised approach is necessary to not further enforce extremist views. No violence or harsh language must be included.

Literature and web sources

- De vlaamse minister van binnenlands bestuur, inburgering, wonen, gelijke kansen en armoedebestrijding. *Actualisering van het actieplan ter preventie van gewelddadige* radicalisering en polarisering. 3. April 2015. Available: https://preventie-radicalisering-polarisering.vlaanderen.be/sites/preventie-radicalisering-polarisering/files/actieplan_preventie_radicalisering_actualisatie_20170602.pdf

- Dzhekova,R, Mancheva, M, (2016) Radicalisation in Bulgaria. Threats and Trends

- Dzhekova R., Ralchev S., Stoynova N. *COUNTRY PAPERS ON MACRO-LEVEL DRIVERS: Drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism in the light of state dynamics in MENA and the Balkans: BULGARIA*. European Institute of the Mediterranean, July 2021. Available:https://h2020connekt.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Bulgaria_CONNEKT_Macro_Drivers.pdf

- CSD. *10+1 Good Practices in Preventing Intolerance, Discrimination, and Group Hatred in Central and Eastern Europe.* Sofia: CSD, 2020.

- *Undersøgelse af tre indsatser over for negativ social kontrol samt radikalisering,* VIVE og forfatterne, København 2021

- *Kort fortalt*, Undersøgelse af tre indsatser over for negativ social kontrol og radikalisering. Anika Liversage & Line Mehlsen, Følgeforskningsrapport fra VIVE, Udlændinge og Integrationsministeriet, 2021

- *Den nationale handlingsplan til forebyggelse af æresrelaterede konflikter og negativ social kontrol*, Styrelsen for international rekruttering og integration, Oktober 2020

- *Svar på 10-forespørgsel vedrørende Aarhus-modellen for antiradikalisering*, Socialforvaltningen. Aarhus Kommune, 2015

- *Evaluering af myndighedsindsatsen forud for og i forbindelse med terrorhændelsen den 14. og 15. februar 2015 i København*. København: Rigspoliti, 2015.

- *Modstandskraft mod radikalisering og voldelige ekstremisme*, CERTA Intelligence & Security, TrygFonden. 2017

- *Antidemokratiske og Ekstremistiske miljøer I Danmark: en kortlægning*, København: SFI 2014. Regeringen, 2015

- *Et stærkt værn mod terror: 12 nye tiltag mod terror*. Regeringens handlingsplan. København: Justitsministeriet. 2015

- Council of Europe. 2015. *Prevention of radicalisation and manifestations of hate at grassroots level.* Available: https://rm.coe.int/168071b265

- Sotlar, A. 2005. *Nekateri problemi pri zaznavanju in definiranju ekstremizma v družbi.* V G. Meško, M. Pagon, B. Dobovšek (ur.), Izzivi sodobnega varstvoslovja (str. 273- 279). Ljubljana: Fakulteta za policijsko-varstvene vede

- Černigoj, A. 2020. *Preprečevanje radikalizacije v Republiki Sloveniji – od represivnega k vseskupnostnemu pristopu.* V Varstvoslovje (str. 100–114). Ljubljana: Fakulteta za varnostne vede.

- Marone F. *Ties that Bind: Dynamics of Group Radicalisation in Italy's Jihadists Headed for Syria and Iraq.* The International Spectator, 2017.

Other web sources:

- https://finance.belgium.be/en/about_fps/institutions_dependent_upon_fps_finance/financial_intelligence_processing_unit

- https://cuta.belgium.be/

- https://www.federation-wallonie-bruxelles.be/index.php?id=detail_article&no_cache=1&tx_cfwbarticlefe_cfwbarticlefront%5Baction%5D=show&tx_cfwbarticlefe_cfwbarticlefront%5Bcontroller%5D=Document&tx_cfwbarticlefe_cfwbarticlefront%5Bpublication%5D=1753&cHash=c1a49278999ea1e89622402808b04533

- http://ymcadobrich.ngobg.info/

- https://www.home4cooperation.info/

- http://www.mjpo.gov.cy/mjpo/mjpo.nsf/sectorgend02_el/sectorgend02_el?OpenDocument

- https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/cyprus

- https://politis.com.cy/politis-new

- https://www.nicosia.org.cy/el-GR/discover/cultural-centers/41162/

- https://www.unic.ac.cy/centres/academically-affiliated-institutions/mediterranean-institute-of-gender-studies-migs/

- https://www.yumpu.com/da/document/view/24461285/dialogkorpset-social

- https://base.socioeco.org/docs/o_nom_4019.2011.pdf https://practice-school.eu/el/

- https://www.grtimes.gr/ellada/ekdilosi-gia-tin-exaplosi-toy-diadiktyakoy-extremismoy-stoys https://commitproject.eu/support-line/

- https://commitproject.eu/ https://priority-project.eu/#our-aim

- https://www.socioeco.org/bdf_fiche-legislation-67_en.html https://www.ycare.eu/el/

- http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/dossier/pdf/AC0367b.pdf

- http://giuri.unife.it/it/dipartimento/archivio-eventi/anno-2021/workshop-radicalizzazione-e-sistema-informativo-media-e-social-network-nei-processi-di-radicalizzazione#null

- https://practice-school.eu/the-project/

- http://www.forwardproject.unisi.it/en/descrizione-progetto/

- https://www.gov.si/teme/boj-proti-terorizmu/

- https://www.almamater.si/projekt-mates-s371

- http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3418

- https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/slovenia/43-strategy-for-the-social-inclusion-of-young-people

- https://www.berlingske.dk/samfund/skudt-ned-efter-bogreception-her-er-bogens-fortaelling-om-nedim-yasar

- https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/tema/nedim-yasar-draebt

- https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/draebt-eks-bandeleder-var-igennem-exit-program-saadan-fungerer-det

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nedim_Yasar

- https://podimo.com/dk/shows/5d1d7451-e6bd-4b31-b84b-e9670078a8b4?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=DK_PERFORMANCE_DSA_CONTENT&utm_term=NA&utm_content=NA&gclid=Cj0KCQjw852XBhC6ARIsAJsFPN02XwTk71TEuDNpntkpe5tbub--N_tMnD-Q5fPsg_P8_BLMQCNCZrgaAsAnEALw_wcB

- https://parallaximag.gr/

- https://www.newsbomb.gr/

- https://actearly.uk/real-stories/

- https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/docs/default-source/zalozba/pages-from-radikalizacija-v-smeri-nasilja_knjizni-blok_tisk.pdf?sfvrsn=2

- https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran_en

- https://www.eryica.org/

- https://www.gov.si/drzavni-organi/organi-v-sestavi/uprava-za-probacijo/o-upravi/

- https://www.gov.si/en/topics/counter-terrorism-efforts/

Additionally, there are some EU-funded projects that offer toolkits or information on radicalization:

- http://www.dare-h2020.org/

- https://yeip.org/

- https://trivalent-project.eu/relevant-projects/

- https://www.precobias.eu/

- https://www.extremelyunited.eu/

- https://dradproject.com/

- https://participation-in.eu/
- https://ct-morse.eu/projects/
- https://counter-project.eu/
- https://www.pave-project.eu/
- http://grease.eui.eu/about/project/
- https://www.sereny.eu/
- https://www.frstrategie.org/en/programs/european/impact-europe
- https://prepare-project.eu/
- https://efus.eu/topics/project-practicies-partnership-against-violent-radicalisation-in-cities/
- https://h2020connekt.eu/the-project/